COMMUNIZING CARE

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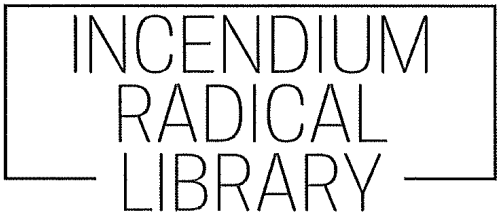

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Communes are answers to the essential question that will arise in a revolutionary process:

"How can we take care of each other?"

The demand to abolish the family has served as a way of imagining life beyond compulsory heterosexuality, misogynistic subjugation and familial violence.[1] It brings up profoundly personal anxiety for many who believe that the family is the only protection against the violence of the state, white supremacy, or poverty. Opponents equate abolishing the family with childhood neglect and a prohibition on affection and care.

Marx and Engels were known for avoiding speculative depictions of communist life, objecting to imaginaries that lacked a strategy for how such a society could emerge from the contradictions of capitalism. In Anti-Dühring and its excerpted form in Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, Engels laid out the division Marxists would use to fend off any threat they may inadvertently become science fiction novelists. Though I agree that concrete descriptions of communist life cannot easily serve the programmatic function imagined by utopian socialists, I also believe that a return to speculative visions of communism can again serve us today. The horror of 20th century Soviet states calling their class- and wage-labor based societies "communist" calls on us to do what Marx and Engels avoided: write science fiction on futures we want to create. Such visions may provoke or enrich, but their utility is not in reading them as proposals to be implemented by the convinced. Their power lies in making visible the tenuousness and horror of the present, and in supporting an unfolding process of exploration and discovery in the midst of struggle.

When evoking the abolition of the family, Marx and Engels use the word Aufhebung for abolish. A Hegelian concept sometimes translated as "a positive supersession," Aufhebung is to preserve, uplift and radically transform. This meaning is largely unlike the American legacy of anti-slavery abolitionists. Demands to abolish the family are not efforts to destroy people's ability to form caring, romantic, or parental ties, nor to celebrate the pressures market economies put on domestic life. Instead, to abolish the family is to free our capacity to care for each other into more humane forms. Here I offer one speculative sketch of social reproduction to replace the family, specifically the commune as initially suggested by the early 19th century French socialist Charles Fourier.

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[1] For recent discussions of family abolition, see Sophie Lewis, Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against the Family, Verso Books, 2019; KD Griffiths and JJ Gleeson, "Kinderkommunismus: A Feminist Analysis of the 21st-Century Family and a Communist Proposal for its Abolition," Ritual, 2015; Madeline Lane-McKinley, "The Idea of Children," Blind Field, 2018; and ME O'Brien, "To Abolish the Family: The Working-Class Family and Gender Liberation in Capitalist Development," Endnotes, 2019. This essay is a sequel and follow-up to the latter piece.

Qualities of Communist Social Reproduction

The family serves as the main institution that mediates proletarian dependency on the wage. Along with the wage, welfare programs and the carceral system, we depend on those we call family to survive. For many proletarians unable to work, including infants, small children, people who are disabled and the very old, the main means of securing resources are from personal, familial relationships of dependence on a wage laborer. The growing systems of market-based reproductive care are no escape from this dual dependency on the family or the wage, as they are paid for from one's own wage or that of a family member.

In our society, love and care are bound within the dependency and obligation of the family, and with them much of the labor of social reproduction. The family, therefore, takes a contradictory form in our world, both the means of love in the midst of a harsh and dangerous world, and a space of private dependency with little protection from the risk of internal abuse, violence, and heteronormativity. However good some families may be, their privacy and insularity buffers them from the necessary process of struggle. For those unable to live well under this gender regime, the gamble of who your family happens to be is a matter of life and death. The state, the wage, and the family: each oppose gender and sexual freedom, and each are incompatible with a full, free expression of human flourishing through gender and sexual diversity. The abolition of the family must be the positive creation of new institutions and practices of love, reproduction and erotic life.

In place of the coercive system of atomized family units, the abolition of the family would generalize what we now call care. Care of mutual love and support; care of the labor of raising children and caring for the ill; care of erotic connection and pleasure; care of aiding each other in fulfilling the vast possibilities of our humanity, expressed in countless ways, including forms of self-expression we now call gender. Care in our capitalist society is a commodified, subjugating, and alienated act, but in it we can see the kernel of a non-alienating interdependence.

Around the People's Kitchen

People spontaneously form self-organized communities based on collectivizing reproduction during periods of prolonged insurgency. I call these communes, and consider them early forms of social reproduction that could come to dominate under communism. When large numbers of people directly confront the state and capital in forms that bring them into a shared location for multiple days, they often develop practices for collectively procuring food, cooking, and shared eating; for sleeping arrangements in proximity to each other; for

sharing child rearing responsibilities and aiding disabled comrades. All work to share the work of care, to enable diverse participation, and to protect each other against harm.

We see some variation of this wherever prolonged occupations take root: in rural, direct-action protest camps like Standing Rock in the Dakotas or the ZAD in France, or in movement of the squares. In the Oaxaca Commune of 2006, women created collective reproductive activities on the barricades as a means of sustaining the protests and resisting the gender domination of home life:

The barricades were places where the people of Oaxaca slept, cooked and shared food, had sex, shared news, and came together at the end of the day. Resources such as food, water, gasoline and medical supplies were re-appropriated and redistributed, and in the same way, reproductive labor was re-appropriated from the specialized sphere of the home and became the underscoring way to reimagine social life and collective bonds.[2]

These arrangements serve immediate needs as part of an ongoing struggle. They collectivize reproductive labor, create new shared forms of intimacy and friendship, open new avenues for contesting gender and sexual relations, and can work to directly challenge the atomized, household structure of the nuclear family. Though misogyny, homophobia and sexual violence have often been the horror of such shared protest sites, their collective and political character provides a better forum to contest and challenge such dynamics than the isolated family. The protest camps we need must combine emergent forms of communist reproduction with feminist and queer practice, and ultimately, perhaps, better sex.

Just as the communal kitchen arises in past insurgencies, the commune as the prevalent mode of social reproduction could arise under a wider condition of communization. Though we can't know the conditions of future insurrections, a few features characterize communist measures: a critical mass of proletarians rapidly seizing, transforming and putting into use the infrastructure and land, to enable non-market human survival and human flourishing. The obligatory nuclear family relation and wage labor would operate as direct obstacles to such shared survival, freedom and the persistence of the insurrection. If the nuclear family is not radically challenged, its pernicious counterrevolutionary logics of property, misogyny, heteronormativity and domination remain untouched. The communist reproduction of material life must resist dependency on obligatory family relations and participation in wage labor. It would instead be pursued through the democratic, collective management and global circulation of productive activity without market mediation.

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[2] Barucha Peller, "Self-Reproduction and the Oaxaca Commune," ROAR, 2016

In their 2016 article "Insurrection and Production," Angry Workers imagine such a potential communizing revolutionary process in the UK, focusing on the essential industries that must be taken over for an insurrection to persist. Similar studies are necessary elsewhere, though much of their analysis parallels US conditions. They propose the formation of collective domestic units with each unit collectivizing food production and consumption. The commune here is not a prefiguration but necessitates the generalized condition of communism. They write:

The uprising and takeover of essential industries has to go hand in hand with the formation of domestic units comprising 200 to 250 people: communal spaces (former hotels, schools, office blocks, etc.) as central points for distribution, domestic work and local decision-making. The quick formation of such domestic units is as important as the takeover of the essential industries. Mainly in order to break the isolation of domestic work and gender hierarchies, but also to create a counter-dynamic to the centralisation in the essential industries: a decentralisation of certain social tasks and decision making.

This is very different from what were called communes in the 20th century: deliberate, small-scale countercultural communities attempting to survive under a market society. These 20th century communes include back-to-the-land collective farming communities in the 1960s and 1970s, group houses of hippies and punks, urban squats, queer families living together, and utopian planned communities. These are legitimate strategies for trying to live less alienated lives in the atomizing conditions of the market. Such practices are an admirable part of radical traditions, but as they operate within capitalist conditions, their limits are severe.

Communes in a capitalist society are forced into the shared poverty of economic self-sufficiency and isolation, or depend on significant contributions from wage labor or inherited wealth. The pressures of state policies, poverty, class contradictions among residents, or lack of mental health care inevitably exacerbate interpersonal conflict, and often lead to the eventual collapse of such deliberate communities. Only considerable class privilege offers long-term stability.

Further, many proponents of such planned communities mistakenly imagine that their very existence will inspire their gradual spreading in the shell of a capitalist society, providing the means of living anti-state communism in the present. Such thinking has produced the blossoming of isolated countercultures, but nothing suggests it could ever offer an exit from the rule of capital and the capitalist state. The structural conditions of proletarianization, market dependency and state violence make such a vision of

a revolutionary transition impossible without generalized insurrection, and leave such communities inherently unstable, inaccessible and isolated.

For Angry Workers, and the analysis here, the commune is instead the collectivization of reproductive labor and consumption, the abolition of the family, and the freeing of love, care and eroticism into a collective, democratic space of shared life. To survive as the basis of freedom, the commune must be a part of a broader and successful effort to destroy the coercive mechanisms of the racial state, to seize the means of production and collective survival, and to defeat the class enemies of the revolutionary struggle. The commune can only survive under the conditions of global communization.

On Charles Fourier

This vision of the commune as a collective, erotic and joyful site of reproductive labor most closely resembles the theories of Charles Fourier. Fourier was a French merchant, clerk, and writer, and a major figure in what has come to be called the utopian socialist tradition. He was born shortly before the French Revolution and published most of his work in the early 19th century, dying in 1837. Fourier's writing on the evils of the market, the bourgeois family, and collective communes became tremendously influential on socialist politics of the 19th century. There is clear evidence that Marx closely read Fourier, and many of Marx's greatest statements in support of women's rights, gender equality and women's freedom are near verbatim quotes of Fourier.

Fourier is best known for three theoretical and political contributions: First, he identified early that the horrors of poverty were a result of the growing market economy, and that socialists needed to abolish markets and private property. This new society would guarantee all a "social minimum," a concept of universal material provision that became central to new socialist thinking. Fourier defines it as essential to the shared well-being of the coming society: "Finally, in this new order the common people must enjoy a guarantee of well-being, a minimum income sufficient for present and future needs. This guarantee must free them from all anxiety either for their own welfare or that of their dependents."[3] Second, Fourier was a major proponent of women's rights, seeing the subjugation of women as a cornerstone of bourgeois society, the family, monogamous marriage, and the oppressive social order. He advocated extensively for the social, economic, and sexual rights of women, and is believed to have coined the word "feminism." He generated a theory later adopted by Marx and others, that the degree of freedom in a society is best measured by the level of women's emancipation.

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[3] Quotations from Fourier taken from his 1808 The Theory of the Four Movements. Eds. Gareth Stedman Jones & Ian Patterson, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Third, Fourier proposed that the solution to the horrors of the market and monogamy was a form of commune he termed the phalanx, numbering 1,600 people in a vast building of the phalanstery. Fourier's vision of the phalanx was embedded in his science of the human passions, a "theory of passionate attraction." By carefully examining the natural instincts, proclivities, pleasures, and developmental capacities of humans, we could design deliberate communities that perfectly calibrate personality types. The phalanxes would be shared spaces of labor as productive centers exporting a particular foodstuff or manufactured product. They would collectivize all reproductive labor, designed to maximize serving the diverse pleasures of food and daily consumption by all residents. Fourierist communes were started throughout the US and Europe in the 1830s and 1840s.

Rather than relying on compulsion to maintain social order or productive work, these communities could design "amorous work" to skillfully use pleasure, eroticism, and joy as incentives, so that collective and individual benefit align. "Useless as it is today," he wrote, "love will thus become one of the most brilliant mainsprings of the social mechanism." (176) Fourier's theories of human passions were fundamental to his vision of social harmony. Love and attraction would replace domination as the central social bond of society.

Though Fourier's writing on the erotic were not as widely regarded, he saw his commitments to sexual freedom and fulfillment as essential to his social theory. As well as a social minimum, he advocated for a "sexual minimum," where the physical, erotic needs of all were guaranteed by their community, allowing each person the freedom to pursue full, authentic love.

We are going to discuss a new amorous order in which sentiment, which is the noble side of love, will enjoy an unparalleled prestige and will endow all social relations with a unique charm. How will sentimental love maintain this dominion? Through the fact that the physical impulses, far from being fettered, will be fully satisfied. (340)

Fourier may have been fiercely critical of the misogyny of today's incel movement, but he worried about the despair of those denied sexual pleasure: "The disorders caused by the fear of amorous deprivation are not, in fact, as obvious as those caused by hunger riots. But the mutiny of love is only the more effective for being hidden and concealed behind all sorts of masks." (340) He was confident that humans are naturally polyamorous, bisexual, and erotically joyful. The free love of the phalanx would be among its greatest appeals, and soon no one would be drawn back to the hypocritical horror of the conjugal family.

Fourier allowed himself a considerable degree of outlandish fancy in his writing on sexual freedom. He went to some length describing the integral role carefully choreographed orgies would play in future communes. As a parody of the Catholic Church, he described a new, voluntary clerical hierarchy based on sexual skill, sexual selflessness, and the capacity to bring sexual pleasure to the ugliest in society. As a replacement for the horrors of war, he imagined roving armies of amorous youth competitively demonstrating their erotic prowess on battlefields. Those who were sufficiently awed would signal their defeat by submitting themselves to voluntary erotic bondage and orchestrated sexual punishments for a limited duration. One such future encounter between traveling erotic armies and their hosts proceeds:

When the Head Fairy waves her wand a semi-bacchanalia gets underway. The members of both groups rush into each other's arms, and in the ensuing scramble caresses are liberally given and received. Everyone strokes and investigates whatever comes to hand and surrenders himself or herself to the unfettered impulses of simple nature. Each participant flits from one person to another, bestowing kisses everywhere with as much eagerness as rapidity. (389)

This initial orgy is disrupted by the intervention of same-sex desire: "To break up the skirmish, use should be made of a divisive agent. Since everything is done by attraction in Harmony, mixed or homosexual attractions should be employed. Groups of Sapphists and Spartites should therefore be thrown into the fray to attack people of their own kind." (390) This allows the sexual priesthood to issue their recommendations for the most compatible romantic pairings, as "the goal of Harmony is to establish compound amorous relationships based on both physical and spiritual affinities. Thus while the opening sensual skirmish is indispensable, it is only a prelude." (390)

After one such dry erotic exposition, Fourier teases us, "Yet the minor details I have touched on will already have been enough to let you see how the new order will open the way to love affairs of such splendour and variety that all Civilisation's tales of love will evoke nothing but pity." (179)
Fourier, in short, was a delightfully kinky science fiction writer, and an inspiration to imagining pro-queer communes of the future. Fourier's work can provoke in us not only a concrete alternative to the family as a unit of social reproduction, but an open-ended erotic desire for a better mode of life we have yet to discover.

Communes to Come

Rather than as the implementation of a plan, the commune could arise spontaneously out of insurrection. As masses of proletarians directly confront

state, capital and oppression in their personal lives, they will need to turn to strategies of collective survival beyond the family. During an insurrectionary period, people would initially appropriate large buildings as centers of social reproduction, with collective canteens, shelter, childcare centers, medical care, and halls for democratic assemblies. Parents joining in the insurrection would likely come to share the labor of childcare to enable their full participation. These new institutions could offer both shared survival, and new forms of joy and belonging.

As an insurrection unfolds and consumes larger parts of society, collectivizing domestic, social reproductive labor offers a strategy of survival and community. There would be a spontaneous, overall tendency towards the formation of the commune as a primary unit of domestic life. Isolated households would lack the means of materially reproducing themselves without access to the market and market-based systems of distribution like supermarkets and box stores and their associated supply chains. Disrupting capitalist production, the state and the family would necessitate their rapid replacement with new institutions, chiefly the collective life of the commune. Communes are answers to the essential question that will arise in a revolutionary process: "How can we take care of each other?"

As the communes begin to offer material stability and supportive community, many less-normative families would choose to self-abolish, joining communes and dissolving their economic and social insularity into the broader community. Much recent debate has contrasted family abolition with forms of alternative, loving and non-normative families forged by some people of color and queers against white supremacist heteronormativity. Rather than a retrenchment of the family, such chosen forms may be the particular strategy that the yearning towards family abolition and shared care often takes in our world now. In a revolutionary process, queer-chosen family, women-headed families of color impacted by migration and mass incarceration, families living in poverty, and those surviving through other non-heteronormative working-class kinship relations would be the most likely to pursue the commune.

Family abolition is not the destruction of kinship ties that currently serve as protection against white supremacy, poverty, and state violence, but instead the expansion of that protection into broader communities of struggle. Those family householders most resistant to self-abolition—white property owners, abusive patriarchs, homophobes and others most invested in the normative family—would need to be challenged through feminist, queer and communist struggle both within their families and in the broader society. The more loving and chosen the family, the more amenable it may be to self-abolishing by joining a large, well-functioning commune.

The estimate of Angry Workers of around 200 people strikes me as reasonable, perhaps preferable to Fourier's 1,600. Two hundred could be a sizable apartment building, the stand-alone homes clustered immediately around a school or other center, or a block of small apartment buildings. The shared kitchen would create a natural initial size, given the logistics of cooking for substantial groups. Other shared consumption and reproductive labor activities would quickly develop, and, depending on demographic distribution and concentration (of children, the elderly, and the disabled), may encompass multiple proximate communes in shared activity.

Establishing such free communities must be a part of an expanding, universalizing, and revolutionizing process that also develops fully communist modes for the production and circulation of material goods. These communes would not be self-sufficient agricultural communities or isolated units struggling to survive in a market society. A communist transition will take time and unfold unevenly in different places. But to survive, it must continue to expand, and ultimately destroy the means of reinstating the domination of the state or the market anywhere. Communist production, without wages, money or exchange, would be the democratic coordination of manufacturing of material goods, the provision of services and the sharing of culture, all managed through many layers of virtual and in-person assessments, surveys, debated algorithms, assemblies, meetings, and many other manifold deliberations to identify and sustainably meet human needs. These communes would be integrated with a communist production system expanding to a global reach, depending on the highest level of technology compatible with human decency and ecological sustainability.

These communes could consolidate within them collective reproductive services, including childcare and education; collective laundry, apartment cleaning, canteen food cooking and serving; repair and maintenance of household goods; mental health and regular medical care; and group entertainment activities. Collectivizing many forms of consumption would reduce the social resources and carbon consumption necessary for providing abundance to all. Advanced, high-skill services requiring substantial facilities and infrastructure could be organized regionally, such as surgical care or specialized education. All members could have full digital access to global networks of communication and collaboration, and could be encouraged to form a variety of networking relationships across other communities. These communes could provide the primary institutions for meeting human material needs while also being the center for new forms of communist sociality, art, expression, community, sex and love.

Direct-democratic governance and internal struggle would be essential for these communes to avoid internal class stratifications. Though some tasks

could be delegated to elected bodies, the essential decisions of the community must be made through group assembly, deliberation in extended conversation, and weighing the concerns of all affected. Direct democracy could serve as a counterweight towards new forms of class rule and internal domination within the communes. Where world production would have to be organized through other, internet-based and networked mechanisms, decisions immediate to daily life could be made by each commune's assembly. Two hundred people is about the maximum size of an in-person assembly where everyone is able to take part in decision making directly, and to have opportunities to speak to the entire group.

Drawing on Fourier's commitment to the harmony of different personality types, communes should be internally diverse, rather than communities of affinity. The free circulation and migration of people between communes could be an essential contribution to such heterogeneity. To avoid becoming centers of survivalism, ethnonationalism or gender fascism, such communes must also resist tendencies towards religious and social homogeneity. Though individuals can harbor whatever beliefs they choose, their relations with others would be subject to public challenge and political struggle, breaking down a rigid divide between private and public.

Among the innumerable unresolved questions in imagining communism is preventing stratification between communes. What practices could assure the universality of "to each according to their need," without the impersonal domination of a state removed from, and governing over, the social body? The lack of property, wage labor, and markets would limit communes' capacity to dominate others, but communes may try to consolidate some forms of private production towards their own consumption internally. How could society prevent some communes from coming to enjoy significantly better living standards than others? Or negotiate conflicts over resources between communes? Or dismantle the existing distribution of geographic inequality, uneven development, and racial stratification that organizes capitalist space?

Those who imagine socialism as impersonal services through a state managing a market economy have intelligible and ready answers: they can outline policies that deliberately counter-weigh against inequality through bureaucratically investing in underdeveloped areas, taxing wealthier areas, and promoting policies of desegregation. But with decision-making dispersed throughout the society as a whole, and the communes functioning as a primary site of consumption, we would require new and currently unknown practices to mitigate against potential inequality in consumption between communes, and to assure basic material well-being for all. Here I support Fourier's rare combination of calling for both dispersed non-market social infrastructures and a universal guaranteed social minimum.

As people encounter a free society, the numbers of people identifying with non-normative sexuality could grow, as we are now witnessing among young people increasingly not identifying as straight. Similarly, when Fourier treats standards of attractiveness and ugliness as transhistorical, I argue instead these will necessarily transform and broaden. Queer culture, queer leadership, and queer movements are an essential resource to communist struggles pursuing richer forms of human freedom. Combined with the collective character of the commune, such queer tendencies could unfold into new dynamics valuing consensual, positive, and healthy sexual relations.

Sex and sexual pleasure could become collective concerns, both challenging sexual coercion and abuse, and supporting people to find paths towards sexual fulfillment. Unlike Fourier, I recognize that full sexual satisfaction and perfect harmony is not likely possible given psychoanalytic insights about human development; but the commune provides the opportunity to transform sexual practice and eroticism into something that could be collectively considered as a human need, a source of well-being, and a field of ethical care. This could occasionally take the form of Fourier's imagined mass planned orgies; but more often it would look like supporting people in their sexual health and sexual satisfaction by incorporating it into mental and physical healthcare; polyamorous relationships could be more common; and a social acknowledgement that good sex is a source of human well-being could all help undo heteronormative misogyny.

Successful communes must include those unable to work. Recent experiences of houseless people joining Occupy encampments make clear the strategic necessity of skillful, collective, and non-exclusionary strategies to deal with disability, drug abuse, and mental illness. Harm reduction, mental health support, and drug recovery would all be central concerns of those initially setting up the communes. The communist society will take many generations to heal from the traumas of capitalism and war, as well as complexities of human biological variation in the forms we now define as disability, neurodivergence, or mental illness.

As the insurrection secures more stable, large-scale material conditions, there could be a countertendency towards the reassertion of the family. If these communes fail to become the generalized form of social reproduction, and the nuclear family again became the main unit of consumption, society would see the return of the capitalist family's current logic of conservatism, whiteness, property-ownership, and self-isolation. The return of the family would contribute to counterrevolution, the reassertion of the state, and the failure of communism.

To resist this countertendency, the contradictions of gender and sexuality could become central to resisting such a return to the family. Like Fourier, I imagine self-interest coupled to transformed consciousness would be essential to maintaining the collective commitment to the commune. Women and feminized partners could refuse the reimposition of the family, having witnessed the reduced domestic labor of the collective commune, and the opportunities the commune affords to contesting sexist relationship dynamics. Queer and trans people could recognize in the commune the means of resisting the abuse and domination of the family for themselves and future queer and trans children. Those who have experienced the insurrectionary commune could recognize in it the material basis for a freer gender and sexual order, and choose to defend and expand its reach. All those who come to realize what is at stake in winning communism could join queers, trans people, and feminists in resisting the return of the family, and instead fight for the family's full replacement with the commune.

If the communes succeed, gradually new forms of architecture, design and construction would reflect the needs for both a combination of heterogeneous private living space for individuals and small chosen clusters, and shared space for reproductive labor and consumption. In the design of new physical spaces for communes, people could have sufficient private and personal space for themselves and their self-chosen kin. But many things now done in the private home could be far better done in shared space: canteens can replace most kitchens and dining rooms; crèches replacing a child's individual play room; entertainment rooms could serve as places to watch television or hang out in groups; personal studies could instead be shared libraries and co-working areas; home maintenance and cleaning equipment could be available in common space; vehicles could be similarly shared. The commune of around 200 is small enough all of these things are close at-hand and easily accessible at any hour. On the other hand, the commune being much larger than currently existing households reduces the need for individualized consumption and isolated living space to a reasonable minimum. In most cases, private space could be limited to clusters of comfortable bedrooms for those opting to live in a family-like arrangement grouped around a single shared room, easily accessible to the commune as a whole.

Within the commune, kinship ties could persist in many forms, but would be integrated with a broader, interdependent community. Individuals could opt into an arrangement of co-parenting with one or more adults, creating family-like arrangements for purposes of raising children. In recent decades, research into psychological development has established children do need the consistent attention of a small number of adults early in life. This challenges some historical family-abolitionist currents that have mistakenly seen mother-infant bonds as inherently oppressive and in need of complete

prohibition. Among the heterogeneous arrangements of close relationships within a commune, people may choose to raise children they gestate or with whom they have a biological relationship; or they may choose other arrangements; or they, their child, or those immediately in the life may change those arrangements as a child ages. Similarly, a few may choose to form lifelong relationships with their biological family, or to partner romantically for the long term with one other person and incorporate child-rearing as a practice.

Yet these close parenting or familial units would not serve as an economic unit in any sense and would not organize material consumption. Instead, they would only act as a voluntary and personal arrangement to be entered into within a broader economic unit, within the ready availability of multiple alternatives for anyone to opt out. If a child found their living situation intolerable, there would be many other adults interdependent with them and in social proximity who could observe the situation, intervene collectively if needed, and offer easily accessible alternative housing arrangements, including other families the child could join, or crèches specializing in such tasks. Children could pass through multiple households and living arrangements as they grow up—including time in children-centered group housing—always within a building or short walk from the original group of adults who they may identify as their parents. When they come of age, as Fourier imagined, they could set out to travel across continents exploring the richness of the world, maintaining digital remote contact with their friends and many forms of familial relations. These alternatives allow parents as well to opt out, assuring their children's material and social needs will be met by others.

The commune could come to prioritize gender discovery, exploration, and expression in every person. New gender modalities could be integrated with child-rearing, with games and social spaces, with entertainment, and with medical care. Gender liberation is an essential feature of creating a new basis for communist human well-being. In the communization of society and the abolition of the family, gender would undergo massive transformations to no longer serve as a basis for the division of labor, interpersonal domination, or sexual violence. Instead, gender could become what is already prefigured in trans experience: a form of expressing subtle personal truth, the beauty and richness of human expression, and the wielding of aesthetics, eroticism and personal fulfillment.

Writing in 1808, Fourier describes the timeline of the complete revolution in all social relations. Though like all past revolutionaries he proved wrong in his timeline, he is right that communism is always immanent to the present, as the real movement to abolish the existing order of things:

Do not be misled by superficial people who think that the invention of the laws of Movement is just a theoretical calculation. Remember that it only requires four or five months to put it into practice over a square league, an attempt which could even be completed by next summer, with the result that the whole human race would move into universal harmony, so your behaviour should be governed from now on by the ease and proximity of this immense revolution. (306)

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